

# Ansible Link

## David Langford



Dr Samuel Johnson responded to the various affronted and review-challenged sf writers I've quoted here and elsewhere: "An author places himself uncalled before the tribunal of criticism, and solicits fame at the hazard of disgrace." Well, he would say that, wouldn't he?

### A Miscellany of Men

Judge Dredd is to expand remorselessly from his comic strips into spin-off novels from Virgin Books. One authro's proposal, however, was given the thumbs-down by Dredd's owners Fleetway on the basis that it portrayed the Judge as a brutal, ruthless, heartless, fascist bastard, whereas (to widespread noises of amazement) he's not that kind of guy at all. The author bounced back with a cuddlier characterization, no doubt filled with appeasing lines like "Drokk! Take that!, er, please, ma'am..." Meanwhile it seems the Dredd novel contracts have an alarming descending royalty scale – since Fleetway's percentage rises so sharply with sales that everyone else has to help absorb it. As my informant naughtily put it: it's good pay for not reading their own comics, if their idea of Judge Dredd's character is anything to go by.

Patrick Nielsen Hayden, editor at Tor Books, freezes my soul with a flyer about *Nude Trek 2: The Wrath of Klothes*, the first nudist Star Trek convention, run by The Slugs Nudist Club in chilly Washington State (January 1993). Perhaps the most macabre aspect is his covering note: "Not a hoax."

Laurence James could only be persuaded to say, of the sensational *Dark Future* hearing reported last issue (which removed his entire series of young-adult books from sale): "The judgment reminds me of the infamous Schleswig-Holstein issue. Which I'm sure you'll recall was so complex that only three men ever understood it. One went mad, one is dead and the third has forgotten..."

Christopher Priest, though toiling dutifully on his new novel *The Blind Ear*, is a media man these days... with a three-part TV drama serial called *The Cull* commissioned by BBC2 and his

own dramatization of *The Glamour* completed for BBC Radio 4 (as I write, it is scheduled for Easter Monday). The recording of *The Glamour* sounds like fun: in CP's own words, "A highlight was listening to the effects people build up a car bomb from scratch, beginning with a dynamite explosion (sounded a bit like a door slamming), then layers added to give echo, reverberation, windows shattering, metal lumps skidding down the road, ground juddering, windows rattling, people screaming, alarm bells going. When this was played to the actors, two of them ducked – I too jumped out of my skin, and I knew it was coming! The BBC people were so pleased with it that they put it into the effects library. Me: 'Here, that's my car bomb!' They: 'Sorry, squire, it's ours now.'" One sound that did defy the BBC effects men was that of a ring-pull beer can; the lateral-thinking solution was to nip out to a vending machine for a few Cokes.

David Redd of past *Interzone* fame is still battering at the editorial defences of New Worlds, and reports an exciting breakthrough: this time the story came back but the covering letter is to be quoted in David Garnett's NW editorial. Thus encouraged, Mr Redd is thinking of giving up fiction and embarking on a career of writing covering letters.

William Shatner was a winner in 1992's uncoveted and corruptly voted Hugo (*sic*) spoof awards, in the category "Best Dead Writer." (By hallowed tradition, this one is invariably awarded to a living author.) The Hugo trophy is a little rocket on a distinctive base; the Hugo is a bit of wood with a scorchmark where the rocket has supposedly taken off. Among the other winners were our very own Lional Fanthorpe ("Banger Award" category, whatever that might be) and that perennial favourite *The Last Dangerous Visions* ("Invisibility Award").

### Infinitely Improbable

The Philip K. Dick Award will presumably have eventuated, or disengaged, or whatever it does, by the time this appears. Its shortlist comprises Colin Greenland's *Take Back Plenty*, Richard Grant's *Through the Heart*, Elizabeth Hand's *Aestival Tide*,

R.A. Lafferty's *Iron Tears* and Elisabeth Vonarburg's *In the Mothers' Land*.

Ten Years Ago... a Californian rare-book auction featured asbestos-bound editions of both *Fahrenheit 451* and *Firestarter*, though not alas the legendary *Complete Works of H.P. Lovecraft* bound in gorgonzola.

Clarke's Law Updated: according to Jeff Swycaffer, quoted in a US fanzine, "Any technology distinguishable from magic is insufficiently advanced."

Futurology Corner. Sf writers extrapolating the future need to take account of the plague of misplaced apostrophes now raging through the English language like devouring flames, or flame's, as it is now spelt. A spy reports a "Swiss" bakery in Teignmouth that advertises gateau'x. The trend is clear. Sf novels set centuries hence will lose all credibility unless they begin something like this: Twenty year's ago the mighty spacefleet's of the United Galaxie's were plunged into chao's... (Copyright Interz'one 1993; all right's res'erved.)

Updates on my previous column will make no sense without *Interzone* 70, ho ho... David Garnett sent minor corrections to the bit on the Games Workshop/Boxtree/Transworld law-suit, in particular that despite the rumours GW's ISBN numbers were valid (but the books weren't registered with *Books in Print*), that the Boxtree launch was excitingly delayed to February and that some *Dark Future* reissues are indeed planned later in the year. Kim Newman (after revealing how *Interzone* authors habitually pass their time: "I've been up an Alp at a film festival drowing in complimentary champagne and French babes, both of which have unadvertised down-sides") added that he'd never much liked the *Dark Future* series title which has just been so expensively defended, and felt his books were hamstrung rather than helped by the GW games tie-in. Guy N. Smith shyly reports that his fan club costs £10 a year or £25 for life – and what's more, you get 10% off rare Smith editions, including foreign ones. Amaze your friends with the Polish for (*Phobia* (*Fobia*), *The Sucking Pit* (*Trzesawisko*), *Fiend* (*Szatan*) and *Crabs on the Rampage* (*Odwet*)...

still be able to give it a chance. A long chance, but a chance nonetheless.

What I had in mind was a very un-Suitlike solution.

The prospect of betraying Suit, mixed with the thought of sex, made me feel all queasy inside. Putting it out of my head for the moment, I turned the corner back into the room, found Detbar, and raised my hand. This time I pulled the trigger. No point in missing out on everything.

Then Suit cleaned up my bloody face and shrank down to a skimpy set of frilled underwear, leaving another pile of extra baggage there in the hallway.

I found Yp in his room, sitting back calmly in his chair, a dim smile on his face. When I looked closer I saw that his eyeballs were rolled back so only white was visible. Dreaming, I guessed. I nudged his shoulder.

"Hello," he said woozily, his eyes rolling back into place. "What happened?"

Suit had my breasts propped up and my nipples stiff under the lace. I smiled at Yp long enough for him to mostly forget his question. "Oh, nothing, much," I said vaguely. "Everyone went to sleep."

"Really? I think I might have gone to sleep too. I had the most remarkable dream..."

The Godball had affected each of these men differently. Detbar had been gloomy and philosophical, Spanic shrill and paranoid, and Yp, it seemed, was growing ever more saintly and benign. I'd saved the right one for last. I plopped myself onto his lap and said: "Tell me about it."

His eyes widened. "Uh, gosh." He draped his arms tentatively around my waist. "Do you think it's possible for something you dreamed... to come true? I mean, because you dreamed it?"

I nibbled on his chin. "A good thing?"

"Uh, yeah," he said. "At least it seems that way."

"Did you dream about me?" I asked, squirming in his lap.

"Well, yes."

"Of course it's possible," I said. "In fact, that's exactly what happened to the Godball, only in reverse. Something bad came true."

"What do you mean?"

"I figured out the mystery of the Assassin. It was just the worst dream the Ball ever had; a thing that hated dreams, and hated the Godball, and was coming to destroy it. The unhappiest, most screwed-up part of the Godball dreamed it. It hated what it had dreamed so much that it wished it far, far away, galaxies away, but it couldn't wish it out of existence completely. So even though it took a long time to arrive, the Assassin was on its way."

"How do you know?"

"Suit talked to the Assassin," I said. "He learned all about it."

"What a horrible thought," he said. "That the most creative thing in the universe..."

I didn't want him troubled. "Forget it," I said. "Everything came out okay." I kissed him on the cheek, and Suit sent up a mist of pheromones.

"Yes," he said. "That's true. My... my dream came true too. You, I mean."

"Right." I pushed him off the chair and towards the bed.

"Oh, wow," he said. "Are we – ?"

